

China: Will The 20th Century Giant Become A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Superpower?

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SUBJECT AREA Foreign Policy

### Executive Summary

Title : China : Will the 20th century giant become a 21st century superpower ?

I. Purpose : The purpose of this paper is to examine if China will become a "superpower" by the 21st century.

II. Thesis : Current indications are that China will become a major world power by the 21st century unless certain events slow it down. What are these factors and what effect could they have on the country.

II: Data : While the superpower of the world are reducing their nuclear arsenal China is quietly enhancing its already formidable nuclear and conventional military capability. With the world's largest population of over a billion people China already enjoys the status of a giant on the international scene. Yet it is not regarded as superpower because of its inability to influence world events.

The country's tumultuous political history from the time of the communist revolution shows how changes in leadership leads to changes in policy and, at times, is detrimental to the country's progress. Its relations with the United States have improved in the last two decades but are still not warm enough. Recent overtures made to it by the Soviet Union have yielded some results but are also far from desirable.

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IV : Conclusion : The country is going to face some delays in achieving its goals but whatever happens to its people is bound to affect the destiny of mankind on Earth

CHINA: WILL THE 20th CENTURY GIANT  
BECOME A 21st CENTURY SUPERPOWER?

#### OUTLINE

Thesis Statement : Current indications are that China will become a major world power by the 21st century unless certain events slow it down. What are these factors and what effect could they have on the country ?

- I. Political situation
  - A. Last four decades
  - B. Current situation
  - C. Future outlook
2. Military situation
  - A. Current developments
  - B. Future plans
  - C. Export potential
3. Foreign Relations
  - A. Sino-America
  - B. Sino-Soviet
4. Conclusion
  - A. Influence of politics on economy
  - B. Military and social influences

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At a time when the two superpower of the world are seriously engaged in reducing their nuclear arsenal a so-called third-world country is quietly engaged in enhancing its already formidable nuclear and conventional military capability. With the world's largest population of over a billion people and also the world's largest armed forces totalling more than four and a half million men and women, China already enjoys the status of a giant on the international scene.

From the time of the communist revolution in 1949 the country has made a great deal of progress. The Chinese industry has undergone a record growth during these years especially from 1958-72 when the average self-sufficiency in all energy forms and has located massive petroleum deposits in Manchuria and offshore. It's coal reserves are rated to be amongst the largest in the world and since 1980 the country has been exporting coal and petroleum even though its petroleum deposits have only been superficially tapped.(11:xvii)

On the agricultural front China's progress has been equally remarkable. It has not only achieved the capability of feeding its vast populace but is even able to export some of the food items that it produces. The country's hydro-electric potential is believed to be the largest in the world and its armament industry has developed into recognized exporter of arms and equipment. Leading economists of the world have predicted that the Chinese economy will be the second largest in the world by the end of the first decade of the next century.(12:7)

Despite all these factors China is merely regarded as a giant on the international scene and not a "superpower" due to its inability to influence world events at large. Will this 20th century giant merely grow into a bigger giant in the years to come or become a "superpower" of the 21st ? Current indications are that it will ,indeed ,achieve the status of a superpower sometime during the 21st century unless certain events at home and abroad slow down its progress and delay this transformation. What are these factors and what effect could they have on the country ?

The first and the major factor is the political set up of the country which has undergone varying degrees of turmoil from the time the communists seized power nearly four decades ago. Nobody realizes this more than the country's ageing statesmen Deng Xiaoping who, during his long political career, had been ousted and disgraced no less than three times.

When the communist government came to power in China in 1949 one of its first acts was to sign a thirty year treaty of friendship, alliance, and mutual assistance with the Soviet Union. This treaty gave the Communist government in Peking enough confidence to enter the Korean war six months later. The war and a mass movement against the local "bourgeois" distracted the country's masses long enough for the government to implement its first five year plan in 1953. This five year period from 1953-57 is regarded as the period of "transition to socialism". During these years Soviet assistance in economic and technical spheres, strengthened by Sino-Soviet agreements signed in 1953-54, played a significant role in the development of the country.(11:31)

The latter part of the fifties stretching into the early sixties is, ironically, known as the period of the "great leap forward". This actually refers to the scheme of Mao Zedong and the communist party to achieve spectacular progress by arousing the masses ideologically and driving them to do their utmost for the country. In reality, this optimistic plan did not work and was an economic failure. It forced Mao to step down from his position as the chairman of the People's Republic leaving other leaders like Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi to consolidate their positions within the party. Deng, at that time, was regarded as a radical leftist due to his support of the anti-rightist campaign of 1957 and the founding of the people's communes in 1958. This new leadership changed the country's foreign policy from "peaceful coexistence" to a "hard line". An aggressive propaganda assault was conducted against the United States for its support of Taiwan. The offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu held by the Nationalists were subjected to a massive artillery bombardment. The Tibetan revolt of 1958 was brutally suppressed and in its aftermath China's relations with India deteriorated as the Chinese accused India of harbouring the Tibetan refugees. Border disputes between the two countries increased the bitterness further. On the northern front, Sino-Soviet border disputes ,which had been brewing for some time, led to the termination of a 1957 agreement between the two countries by which the Soviets were to help the Chinese produce their own nuclear weapons and missiles.(11:35)

In 1962 Mao Zedong, who had been sidelined after the debacle of the "great leap forward" and had spent the previous two years

practically in semi-seclusion, decided to stage a comeback and used his ability to arouse the masses against the "capitalist and anti-socialist" tendencies in the country. This was the "great cultural revolution" of the sixties which shattered the party organization from top to bottom. With the seizure of power by men like Lin Biao and other protagonists of Mao, Deng was removed from all his posts and publicly humiliated.

The cultural revolution ended in 1969 but factional infighting continued well into the seventies. In September 1971, however, the death of Lin Biao led to a steady decrease in the influence of the fundamentalist left wing radicals and they were eventually purged out. The new swing to the right led to the famous visit of President Nixon to China in February, 1972 and the establishment of diplomatic relations with Japan later in the same year. In April, 1973 Deng was rehabilitated by the then Premier Zhou Enlai and appointed vice premier but three years later, with the death of Zhou Enlai, he was ousted again. On September 9, 1976 Mao Zedong died and the radicals lost their major influence. Deng again managed to stage a comeback and at the party session of 1977 he was reappointed to all the posts that he had held prior to his dismissal ie. Vice Chairman of the Chinese Communist party and member of the Politburo and it's Standing Committee.

Due to his own tumultuous career Deng realizes that constant changes in the party leadership, which generally lead to changes in policy, hinder the country's progress. His efforts to provide the country with a stable leadership after him have, however, not been very successful partly due to his own liberal policies at home and partly due to the conservatives opposition to China's

opening its "doors" to the west.

In 1975 Zhou Enlai started his four modernisations in the fields of agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology. These programmes were designed to put China in the same league as some of the leading nations of the world like the United States, Japan and West Germany, by the year 2000. Although the majority of the Chinese leadership and the public realizes that these liberal reforms have yielded substantial results in the last eight years and that it is essential for the country to import western technology if it is to achieve its modernization goals, Chinese politics does not rely on the "bourgeois concept" of democratic majorities. The desire for power and personal likes and dislikes often take priority over the country's needs.

Deng's desire to ensure political continuity has received a severe blow with the forced resignation of his heir apparent, Hu Yaobang, in January 1987. This was also a major setback for the reformers as it allowed the conservatives, who favour a more orthodox brand of socialism and tighter party controls, to seize the initiative. There is widespread speculation that Hu's dismissal was masterminded by none less than Deng himself because of Hu's inability to implement the modernization programmes in the spirit they were to be enforced in. It is also possible that Deng may have made Hu the scapegoat to pacify the conservatives who had become increasingly critical of Hu along with various aspects of these reforms. Whether the conservatives increase their influence in time to come or are purged out by the reformers is anybody's guess. In any case it is unlikely that the



conservatives would reverse the present liberal trend. They may, at the most, slow down the pace of the reforms. As it is, of late, the Chinese leadership has itself set back the year of modernization from 2000 to 2020. At the Pac Rim conference, held in 1986, the vice chairman of the Chinese State Planning Commission stated that it might now take China 75 years to get close to the well developed countries pushing the date further to 2062.(9:31)

Zhao Zhiyang, the sixty seven year old premier, who has taken over Hu's chair as the General Secretary of the party lacks Hu's experience in youth league organs but ha acquired a considerable stature as a national leader. He also does not share Hu's extensive military background but has had close ties with the military at both the regional and the national level. The rural reforms introduced by him as the first party secretary of the province of Sichuan in late 1975, were so successful that they were adopted at the national level by the third plenum of the eleventh central committee in December, 1978. His standing with the military is much better than Hu's who is not regarded by the military as a strong and a stable leader. In fact, it is believed that the military was instrumental in successfully resisting suggestions that Hu replace Deng as the Chairman of the Central Military Commission.

It is obvious that Zhao's major task is to consolidate his position and tackle the conservatives. Even if he succeeds in this difficult task eventually, the process is expected to slow down the reforms which are in the process of implementation and delay the introduction of new ones. (8:14). If Zhao is to leave the premiership open there would be two candidated for the job.

These are the two vice premiers Li Peng and Tian Jiyun. Li was educated in Moscow and is well known in Beijing but not in the country. He is, to an extent, regarded as a conservative. Tian Jiyun, on the other hand, is a reformer who has been a close adviser to Zhao for the last four years and has a reputation for far sighted efficiency. (6: 10)

The conservatives feel that it is better to be aligned to an unfriendly communist power than to a friendly imperialistic one and their coming to power is expected to bring in a modification of the foreign policy in that they may lean towards the East European countries for their requirements. The ideology of the reformers is, perhaps, not much different. In 1980 Deng pointed out, " The infiltration of Bourgeois ideas into China is inevitable, (but) we shall never allow the worshipping of capitalist countries at the expense of national pride and dignity while learning advanced technology and management skills from them".

The second factor which is of importance and will affect Chinese influence in world affairs is the military potential of the Chinese armed forces. According to "The Military Balance 1985-86" published by the International Institute of Strategic Studies, London, China's defence expenditure is estimated at \$ 34.5 billion which makes it the third highest in the world after the Soviet Union and the United States. The presence of Chinese defence firms at international arms exhibitions is becoming increasingly noticeable. The People's Liberation Army which celebrated its sixtieth anniversary in August, 1987 is currently in the process of modernizing and reorganizing its 35 Field

Armies into 24 Integrated Mobile Armies. The eleven military provinces have been reorganized into seven military regions. The first of the newly integrated armies - the 38th - is already deployed in the Beijing Military Region and the second in the Shenyang Military Region.

China has been extremely successful in its rocket launching programmes and since 1970 the Chinese have put no less than twenty satellites into space with only two failures. The temporary grounding of the American space programme also gave a boost to the Chinese plans. They bagged a contract to put Mailist, a Swedish communication satellite, into space for the reported sum of \$ 19.5 million and are believed to be negotiating with no less than eight other countries including Great Britain, Italy Austria, and Canada. (6:12)

The Chinese also have a considerable number of strategic long range missiles. Of these the Dong Feng (East Wind), a solid fuelled missile, is capable of carrying five megaton warheads over a range of 8,078 miles (13,000 Kms.). Looking at the considerable range of this missile it is interesting to analyze its possible strategic employment. The army had equipped its "59" and "62" tanks with laser rangefinders and the integrated armies are using the 5.56 mm. similar in performance to the American M-16. The 105 mm. gun is in use along with the 155 mm. self propelled howitzer. The army is also in the process of computerizing its signals system. (6:13)

The Chinese Air Force has the second highest number of aircraft in the world which are also in the process of modernization. The F-6 bis fighters (MiG-19 variants) already carry effective radar systems. The H-6 bombers (Tu-16s) are well

maintained to effectively deliver the nuclear bombs held in the Chinese armoury. The Chinese Navy has become a blue water Navy with nuclear submarines and missile destroyers. In addition to all this the United States has agreed to supply the Chinese with transport aircraft, helicopters, flight training systems, aerial cameras, and certain types of radars as well as Tow anti-tank and Hawk anti-aircraft missiles.

The American aid package is designed to sharpen the teeth of the Chinese Armed Forces and force the Soviets to withdraw some of their forces from the East European border and place them on the Sino-Soviet border where they are more expensive to maintain. Although this package has been carefully thought out to prevent the use of these weapons or equipment contrary to the interests of the United States it is very difficult to ensure it. China is the fifth largest exporter of arms in the world after the United States, Soviet Union, England and France. In its desire to earn foreign exchange China is very likely to copy them and sell them to whoever wants them irrespective of other considerations. The use of Chinese Silkworm missiles by Iran to disrupt the Persian Gulf shipping has no moral implications for the Chinese. A future scenario could be the use of similar, if not these, weapons by the North Koreans against the South Koreans.

Although Sino-American trade reached a high mark of \$ 7.3 billion last year making the United States China's third most important trading partner the relations between the two countries have not warmed up enough. The expulsion of "New York Times" reporter John Burns in 1986 and two Chinese diplomats from the

United States recently is one such pointer. During the last one year the Chinese press has devoted a great deal of its attention to inform its readers about the shortcomings of the American society and the American political system. On January 20, last year the "People's Daily" described in detail how the economic status of Blacks in America had declined over the past decade. Taiwan remains a major thorn in Sino American relations. The Chinese are obsessed about the reunification of Taiwan with mainland China and have been offering a number of incentives to engineer it. They have even decided to let Hong Kong maintain its capitalistic profile after it reverts to them in 1997 to display an example of their flexibility. The refusal of Taiwan to even consider their proposals makes the Chinese feel that the United States is not exerting enough pressure on Taiwan.

On the other hand overtures of friendship by the Soviet Union have yielded some results. After two decades of animosity the two countries have exchanged visits at the vice premier level. Cultural and educational exchanges have recommenced and the Chinese communist party has reestablished ties with its counterparts in East European countries. Moscow is again actively assisting the Chinese in modernizing the old Soviet style factories which still outnumber the western or west-assisted ones. A possible reason for this may be the fact that the present day leadership, both within the party and the military, has been educated at a time when the Soviet influence in China was at its peak. Many of the top military officers of today were either trained in the Soviet Union or in the military academies set up under Soviet guidance.

China has refused to sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation

Treaty and its growing nuclear capability has already made it an entity in the world's power equation. The economic reforms and the growth rate of country, however, depends on its future political atmosphere. A change in the country's leadership during any time in the future may lead to a change or a reversal in the economic or foreign policy and drastically affect the growth rate. Even though this seems a remote likelihood at this time the country's past history is ample proof that one cannot preclude this possibility.

Deng has over the years reduced the role of the armed forces in the nation's politics substantially possibly to avenge the humiliation suffered by him during the Cultural Revolution at the hands of the army-supported Red Guards. The modernization of the armed forces has been given the lowest priority. A few cosmetic changes in the form of badges of rank and new uniforms have been made to appease the armed forces. Although the men in uniform still maintain their high morale how long this lasts would have to be seen. The pay and allowances of the armed forces are very low compared to their civilian counterparts. An ordinary soldier, in his first year of service makes an average of \$ 4.00 a month which is just enough to gain him a single entry into any provincial discotheque. The strength of the armed forces is being reduced by a million in order to have a qualitatively superior force as opposed to the numerically superior one favoured by "Maoist" doctrine.

The rehabilitation of these men is expected to pose a substantial problem for the Chinese leadership. To add to this, despite extremely strict family planning measures, the country's

population is expected to cross the two billion mark by the year 2050. The economics of employing and feeding these people and the present day problems of inflation and the rapidly rising cost of living is going to be major worry of the future leaders. An appreciation of these factors will not make it very difficult to visualize a China of the future nurturing expansionist tendencies and flexing its muscles to take what it needs or desires.

It is already apparent that, as the Chinese economic and military power is increasing it is becoming more and more involved in regional and world affairs. In December, 1985 Wu Xueqian, the Chinese Foreign minister, stated that, "China will not sit with arms folded if Vietnam invades Thailand, (but) ..will take forceful measures with Thailand. These "forceful measures" have been the delivery of tank and artillery by the Chinese to Thailand. By 1986 the Chinese had also supplied Pakistan with eleven hundred type "59" tanks, twenty four fast attack craft, and more than two hundred frontline fighter aircraft (with over a hundred more on order). In Africa the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Somalia, Tanzania, Zaire, Zambia, and Zimbabwe possess Chinese equipment. (2:24)

The economic problems being faced by the the Soviet Union are expected to relegate its economy to the fourth position by the year 2010 causing a decrease of its influence of China will gradually change the bipolar world as it exists today. Although this is not likely to occur till we are well into the next century what happens to the Chinese till then is what happens to every fourth human in the world and is surely an influence on the destiny of mankind on the planet Earth.

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